

Mission San Antonio de Valero, Convent
Alamo Plaza, between Houston and Crockett Streets
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-318-B

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE VALERO,
CONVENT

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Location: Alamo Plaza, between Houston and Crockett Streets,
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: The State of Texas.

Present Use: Public museum.

Significance: The convent building is an important architectural monument of a Spanish mission and is physical evidence of building practices and techniques of the Spanish colonial period as employed by the Franciscan Fathers on the Texas frontier.

The convent is the first permanent structure in the mission.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Between 1724 and 1727.
2. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of Mission San Antonio de Valero, HABS No. TX-318.
3. Original plans and construction: A report by Fray Miguel Sevillano de Paredes in 1727 described the convent as having "three cells of very good proportions, a gallery and another cell, all of stone and adobe."

Fray Morfi visited the San Antonio area in 1777 and described the convent at that date as a two-story building with a two-story arched cloister and an enclosed compound fifty varas square. In this building at that time were the living quarters for the missionaries, their offices, a refectory and kitchen, and an entrance. Over this entrance was erected a small tower supplied with three field pieces and rifles which were kept closely guarded.

Adjoining the convent was a second structure, one-story and constructed of adobe, which also had an enclosed compound between its gallery and the river. This building was divided into several rooms, the middle ones being the weaving rooms and the end rooms at either side being storage rooms.

In the 1790s, the old convent, then referred to as the Father Minister's dwelling, was a two-story stone building, and further described in an apparently faulty translation as follows:

- "the west and north sides were two stories high with six corridors; five rooms served as cells; the roof of all was sadly in need of repairs. The west line was the same height as the corridor; on the ground floor were five office rooms, four of which were of the same size as the preceeding, and one, quite small, on the landing of the stairs. The second floor contained three cells, above those of the north side, with very bad ceilings, as the boards had rotted."

4. Alterations and additions: From 1849 to early 1850s when the U.S. Army occupied the Alamo complex, the convent was rehabilitated for re-use, as were the other buildings. A new gable roof for the convent was among the new replacements.

In about 1912 the convent was restored using a design based on the circa 1849 renovation work of the U.S. Quartermaster's Department. F. E. Giesecke, a professor of architecture at the University of Texas, designed the restoration plan. J. B. Nitschke was the - superintendent of the construction work.

- B. Historical Context: See Mission San Antonio de Valero, HABS No. TX-318.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a long rectangular one-story structure with a flat roof and a ~~round-arch~~ arcade on its east side.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 60' x 190'.
2. Foundation: Rubble limestone and lime mortar.
3. Walls: Rubble limestone and lime mortar.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing masonry walls; wood flat ceiling system; masonry arcade.
5. Doorways and doors: Modern wood doors; lintel openings.
6. Roof: Flat with bituminous covering.

C. Description of Interior;

1. Floor plan: A series of rooms open out onto the cloister and is inter-connected by doorways.
2. Flooring: Flagstone.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Natural rock wall; painted board ceiling.
4. Doorways and doors: Modern wood doors; lintel openings.
5. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Gas heating.
 - b. Lighting: Electric fixtures.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The longitudinal axis of the convent is oriented north to south.

The convent is west and north of the Alamo church and connected to it by a wall running east to west. The building fronts on Alamo Plaza, a small landscaped area and a busy public street. The west boundary of the Plaza is the present commercial center of the city.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director, Bexar County Architecture Survey
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Bellinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermsen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress.